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ABSTRACT

The increased interest in FLES (Foreign Language in the Elementary Schools) programs has prompted many foreign language educators to consider the impact of program articulation on the development of a successful K-12 language program. Program articulation is the process of providing a smooth transition between foreign language classrooms, and can be viewed from two perspectives: horizontal and vertical. Horizontal articulation focuses on teaching objectives, strategies, and materials, and aims at maintaining continuity between FLES classrooms at the same level. Vertical articulation refers to the direction of the curriculum between schools and stresses that secondary schools must provide foreign language classes appropriate for those students who have experience in FLES classrooms. Specific successful models of program articulation include that of Ferndale High School (Michigan) and Cody Elementary Academy (Michigan). Such successful programs result from ongoing communication and cooperation at all levels, and from a realistic recognition of all the issues involved. (DJD)

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS

ERIC Digest

Foreign Language Program Articulation: Building Bridges from Elementary to Secondary School

Prepared by Jo Anne Wilson

November 1988

Foreign languages are currently enjoying attention unparalleled since the heyday of the early 1960s. There is a renewed interest in and emphasis on elementary school programs that are generally referred to under the broad heading of Foreign Languages in the Elementary School, or FLES. The emphasis on FLES in the 60s did not lead to the anticipated proliferation of second language programs because of a lack of realistic program goals and adequate planning, inattention to sound curricula and appropriate instructional materials, and failure to place qualified teachers in FLES classrooms. It is crucial, therefore, that current attention focus on these elements which are so vital to successful FLES programs. Even with these elements carefully in place, articulation remains a critical factor in the development of a successful K-12 language program.

What Is Foreign Language Program Articulation?

For the educational practitioner, articulation is the process of providing a smooth and logical transition from an elementary to a secondary program and ensuring continuity from one FLES classroom to another. This kind of academic sequencing provides opportunities for those students with both the interest and ability to continue their elementary school language study at the secondary level. Articulation can be viewed from two perspectives: horizontal and vertical.

Horizontal articulation focuses on outcomes, teaching strategies, materials, and evaluation within a course level. If language instruction is offered in more than one elementary school in a district, such instruction should be based on a common curriculum. Teachers from different schools or classrooms must address the same objectives at each course level, while utilizing similar strategies and instructional materials.

Vertical articulation refers to the direction of the curriculum between levels of schools (Lange, 1982). Successful articulation from elementary to secondary programs requires continuous and open communication with teachers at all levels. Thus, secondary programs must provide courses that are appropriate to those students who began language study in elementary school. These students should not be placed with beginners in a middle or junior high school. Most current secondary foreign language programs are designed as entry level courses for students with no previous language study. Secondary schools may need to develop several program tracks to serve the needs of the elementary school language learner. Some districts have found it practical to offer the continuation of the elementary language in a specific secondary school within the district.

Secondary school administrators need to be informed about the types of elementary language programs in their district and to work with the language teachers to accommodate those experienced learners who want to continue language learning at the secondary level. Secondary school administrators also need to work closely with the elementary administrators and teachers to develop a program that will recognize the previous learning of the student and enable that learning to become a foundation for continued language development. The major responsibility for readjustment rests with the secondary schools, where curriculum, methods, and instructional materials must be revised. Such revision must accommodate language students who are drastically different from those who have historically begun language study at the secondary level. Those secondary teachers who have embraced a view of language learning as linear and grammatically based must begin to recognize the value of the communicative skills acquired by the elementary learner where emphasis has been primarily in the skills of listening and speaking. The growing emphasis on teaching language for communication at all levels, and the recognition of language learning as a cyclical process during which the learner acquires needed skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing simultaneously, acknowledge the value of what learners can *do with* the language as contrasted with what they *know about* the language.

Are There Specific Models For Foreign Language Articulation?

The Ferndale, Michigan FLES program had been in place for nine years when, in 1987, the district faced the question of what to do with the growing number of FLES students entering secondary school. The existing middle school language program was dropped, and the next entry point for beginning language instruction was designated as grade 9. Students from all eight elementary schools are now offered the option of continuing their second language study in either one of the district's two middle schools.

Grades K-6:	Sequential FLES
Grade 7:	Secondary Level 2
Grade 8:	Secondary Level 2 (continued)
Grades 9-12:	Levels 3-6

For further information, contact: Lynne Haire, Ferndale High School, 881 Pinecrest, Ferndale, MI 48220, Tel: 313-548-8600.

Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL)
1118 22nd Street NW
Washington, DC 20037

Flint, Michigan's French FLES is offered in three of the district's thirty elementary schools. These schools are designated magnet schools. Students who want to continue their study of French at the middle school level can attend a designated magnet middle school. Sixth grade students apply for admission with the prerequisite of at least three years of instruction in one of the three elementary programs and/or the recommendation of their teacher. Students who complete the two-year middle school sequence are then offered the option of entering a second year French class in any one of the district's comprehensive high schools.

Grades K-6:	Sequential FLES instruction
Grade 7:	Secondary Level 1
Grade 8:	Secondary Level 1 (continued)
Grades 9-12:	Levels 2-5

For further information, contact: Barbara Young, Cody Elementary Academy, 3201 Fenton Rd., Flint, MI 48507, Tel: 313-767-1565.

A number of programs are reviewed in the National Commission Report prepared by the American Association of Teachers of French (Lipton, Rhodes, and Curtain, 1985). Each model reviewed indicates specific articulation sequencing. The most successful examples of elementary to secondary articulation come from those districts where the language programs are based in magnet schools. In Cincinnati, Ohio, students enrolled in the partial immersion program attend a middle school bilingual academy in grades 6-8 . In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, students from the immersion elementary schools attend an immersion middle school.

How Can Foreign Language Articulation Be Planned?

Successful articulation between elementary and secondary schools occurs with ongoing communication and cooperation on the part of foreign language teachers at all levels (Pesola,1988). The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines have considerable value as a starting point for the dialogue necessary to open and maintain communication. The proficiency levels defined in the guidelines do not refer to the number of years of study or instructional time. The categories describe levels of performance that the learner has attained regardless of time spent studying the language.

Well-articulated programs will become a reality when teachers and administrators at all levels realistically face the issues involved. No FLES program should be started without consideration of the options open to those students who want to continue at the secondary level. At the outset, both elementary and secondary staff need to be involved in any planning committee. Such planning should set realistic program goals and develop a sound curriculum. Administrators, teachers, and parents need to be informed of all stages in planning. Such information must be provided in a timely fashion by holding open discussion meetings to clarify the desired goals of the program and to seek input from all concerned. With program goals and curriculum in place, and with qualified teachers in the classroom, a well-articulated sequential program has the potential to produce language learners able to communicate effectively in a second language.

The goal of language learning should be communicative competence. Language proponents must also be honest about the length of time needed to acquire that competence. Real language acquisition occurs only after years of study and effort. A well-articulated K-12 program can have a lasting effect and can produce individuals who are culturally and linguistically prepared to live in the 21st century.

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Resources

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